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ABSTRACT

One difficulty in studying the long-term impact of divorce on children has been the lack of a reliable and valid measure of parental conflict for divorced parents. Items for a post-divorce conflict scale were written and tested using 32 male and 63 female college students from divorced families for Study 1 and 60 male and 75 female students from divorced families in Study 2. Using rational, factor analytic, and internal consistency methods, three subscales--Verbal, Physical, and Indirect Hostility--were developed. Alphas for the revised measure were 0.93 for the total Mother- and Father-Conflict scales. Alphas for the subscales ranged from 0.80 to 0.92. The patterns of correlations between each subscale and other measures support the validity of verbal, physical, and indirect hostility as separate constructs. Appendix A contains the scale, and Appendix B contains six tables of study data. (Author/SLD)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST-DIVORCE PARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE

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Poster presented at the Centennial Annual Convention of
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST-DIVORCE PARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE

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ABSTRACT: One difficulty in studying the long-term impact of divorce upon children has been the lack of a reliable and valid measure of parental conflict for divorced parents. Items for a post-divorce parental conflict scale were written and tested on male and female college students from divorced families. Using rational, factor analytic, and internal consistency methods, three subscales--Verbal, Physical, and Indirect Hostility--were developed. Alphas for the revised measure were .93 for the total Mother- and Father-Conflict scales. Alphas for the subscales ranged from .80 to .92. The patterns of correlations between each subscale and other measures support the validity of verbal, physical, and indirect hostility as separate constructs.

A difficulty that exists when studying the long-term impact of divorce upon children is that of separating the effect of the divorce per se, from the effect of parental conflict. One barrier to resolving this problem has been the lack of a reliable and valid measure of parental conflict for divorced parents. The purpose of the present study was to develop such a measure.

Post-divorce conflict was emphasized because it is likely that conflict exists before a divorce, and therefore, it is more important to find out whether such conflict ends, continues, or erupts following the divorce. Research suggests that children's problems persist if a family continues to experience prolonged periods of conflict following the divorce (Hess & Camara, 1979). Low self-esteem, anxiety, and feelings of loss of control in children of divorce have been associated with high levels of interparental conflict (Hess & Camara, 1979; Jacobson, 1978; Rosen, 1979; Slater & Haber, 1984; Watt, Moorehead-Slaughter, Japzon, & Keller, 1986).

Amato and Keith (1991) performed a meta-analysis of 92 studies of the negative effects of parental divorce upon the well-being of children of divorce. They found the most support for a family conflict explanation. Furthermore, they discovered that children in intact families with high levels of parental conflict exhibited *even lower* levels of well-being than did children from high-conflict divorced families. The authors also pointed out one possible reason for the weak effect sizes found for most of the studies: Researchers have studied mostly the short-term effects of divorce upon children, whereas the effects of divorce on adjustment, beyond the acute reaction, may not be evident until a later time period, e.g., late adolescence and early adulthood. One

example of this is seen in Hetherington's (1972) early work. She found that the impact of father absence on the development of daughters was not evident until puberty. The consequences of parental divorce may turn out to be more serious for the adjustment and quality of life in adulthood than in childhood (Amato & Keith, 1991). In the present study, therefore, the experimenters used samples of late adolescents in developing the scale.

Another difficulty in the research on parental conflict is the failure of investigators to use measures that accord with current theoretical models of divorce conflict. Parental conflict is likely to consist of many dimensions, whereas the available measures of interparental conflict typically assess only one of the dimensions (Forehand & McCombs, 1989). The present instrument was developed to tap two of these dimensions: 1) the conflict style--verbal, physical, or indirect hostility, and 2) the the *frequency* of occurrence of behaviors reflecting a particular conflict style. Using a reliable measure of interparental divorce conflict may help us to better delineate the long-term effects of such conflict upon children of divorce, and to determine which style of conflict is most damaging for children living in that environment.

METHOD

Scale development consisted of two stages. The first study involved construction of the items, deletion of unreliable items, and assessment of the psychometric properties of the subscales. The second study involved retesting the psychometric properties of the revised scale, and correlating the scale with other measures.

Subjects --The subjects for the first and second study were male and female college students who came from divorced families. There were 63 females and 32 males in Study 1, and 75 females and 60 males in Study 2. Subjects were required to have been six years or older at the time of divorce, and to have had parents who were divorced at least two years prior to the study.

First Study

Scale Construction --Items were written to delineate behaviors of divorced parents which could be observed by sons and daughters. Subjects rated the frequency of each behavior during the first year following the divorce and during the year before the study. Both the Mother Conflict and Father Conflict scales were comprised of the same items. A thorough search of the divorce literature helped to identify types of contentious behaviors engaged in by divorced (and divorcing) parents. Items were constructed to constitute the following subscales:

1. **Verbal Hostility**--hostility manifested through verbal behavior:

"My father said things just to spite my mother".

2. **Physical Hostility**--hostility manifested through physical behavior:

"My father threw things at my mother".

3. **Indirect Hostility**--behaviors which suggest that hostility is expressed indirectly or that communication and contact are avoided:

"My mother hung up the phone when my father called".

Using subjects' responses to the initial item pool, item-remainder correlations and subscale intercorrelations were calculated. All scale items were factor analyzed. Items were deleted if they did not correlate with the corrected total score and if they did not load more highly on their assigned subscale.

Second Study

As an initial step in establishing the validity of the Post-Divorce Parental Conflict Scale (PPCS), the revised 82-item scale (39 items for each parent) was given to a new sample of 135 subjects, along with two measures of post-divorce familial relationships--The Relationship with Mother and Father Scale, a scale measuring emotional attachment and coalition with each parent (Schwarz, 1991); the Blame for Divorce Scale (Welch, 1989)--and two other measures. These were the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, a scale measuring social desirability (Paulhus, 1984), and a demographic questionnaire.

Correlations between the PPCS subscales and the above measures were calculated to provide a better understanding of the psychological constructs that the PPCS is measuring. A copy of the current scale can be found in Appendix A.

RESULTS and CONCLUSIONS

Alpha coefficients of internal reliability were calculated separately for all mother and father scales in both studies (see Table 1).[1] These coefficients, which range from .80-.93 for the revised scale, support our conclusion that the Post-Divorce Parental Conflict Scale (PPCS) is a reliable instrument for measuring post-divorce conflict between parents of late adolescents and young adults.

The results of subscale intercorrelations are shown in Tables 2 and 3. One may note that for both mother and father, verbal and indirect hostility tend to be more closely related to each other than either is related to physical hostility. In Study 1, the mother hostility subscales exhibited

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[1] All tables can be found in Appendix B.

moderate to high intercorrelations, whereas the father hostility subscales exhibited low to moderate intercorrelations (see Table 2). Since items were generally deleted from the revised scale when they loaded equally on more than one subscale, it was expected that the correlations between subscales would decrease in the next study. However in Study 2, though the mother hostility subscales exhibited lower intercorrelations, the father hostility subscales exhibited higher intercorrelations (see Table 3). This may be partially due to the fact that, in order to retain identical items for both father and mother scales, some father items were retained even though they loaded highly on two factors. Despite these moderate intercorrelations, the three types of hostility subscales displayed different patterns of correlations with other scales, as described below. This suggests that the subscales are measuring different psychological constructs.

Table 4 displays the correlations of the PPCS with the Blame for Divorce Scale. In general, it appears that a parent's physical hostility is most predictive of blame for the divorce as perceived by sons and daughters: Both sons and daughters blamed mothers when mothers were high on physical hostility, whereas, sons, but not daughters, blamed their fathers for the divorce when fathers were high on physical hostility. Interestingly, fathers were blamed for the divorce by both sons and daughters if they were high on indirect hostility. Verbal hostility was a weak predictor of blame.

One might predict, on the basis of the results obtained from the correlations with the Blame for Divorce Scale, that sons and daughters would be emotionally attached to, or in coalition with the parent who was the target of the hostile behaviors of their ex-spouse. The data for emotional attachment, however, suggest that children of divorce tend to be mainly in sympathy with their same-sex parent (see Table 5). Sons are emotionally attached to fathers when their mothers are physically hostile, daughters are emotionally attached to their mothers when their fathers are physically hostile, and daughters are attached to their mothers when either parent is verbally hostile.

The results from the Coalition-with-Parent subscale (Table 6) suggest that children of divorce often join in coalitions with the opposite-sex parent when their same-sex parent is engaging in hostile behaviors toward their ex-spouse. When fathers are physically, verbally, or indirectly hostile,

sons are in coalition with their mothers. When mothers are physically hostile, daughters are more likely to join in coalition with their mothers.

To sum up, the different patterns of correlations between the PPCS subscales and other measures support the utility of assessing verbal, physical, and indirect post-divorce hostility as separate constructs. Further research is needed to establish the usefulness of this instrument in studying the effect of post-divorce conflict upon children's adjustment. Such studies may prove valuable in augmenting our understanding of the impact of parental conflict upon children of divorce.

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APPENDIX A: The Post-Divorce Parental Conflict Scale

This is a scale which measures experiences of people since their parents have been divorced. All answers are strictly confidential.

Each question is to be answered twice: In the first column, write the number that describes your observations during the *first* year after the divorce.

--In the second column, write the number that describes your observations during this *past* year, that is, during the last 12 months.

Frequency of Occurrence:

--1--The event has never happened (*Never*).
--2--This happened at least once during the year (*Seldom*).
--3--This happened at least once a month (*Occasionally*).
--4--This happened at least once a week (*Frequently*).
--5--This happened every day (*Constantly*).

		Subscale[1]
1.	My mother discussed issues calmly with my father.[2]	I
2.	My mother did not look at my father (ie., make eye contact) while talking with him.	I
3.	My mother disagreed with things that my father said.	V
4.	When my parents argued, my mother brought in old issues from the past.	V
5.	My mother raised her voice while discussing issues with my father.	V
6.	My mother avoided talking to my father directly.	I
7.	My mother avoided my father's presence.	I
8.	My mother gave me messages to tell my father.	I
9.	My mother told my father that he does not support his children.	V
10.	My mother challenged my father about how he spends money.	V
11.	My mother refused to talk with my father about important things.	I
12.	My mother argued with my father about decisions related to me.	V
13.	My mother nagged my father.	V
14.	My mother left the room when my father came in.	I
15.	My mother told my father how he makes her suffer.	V
16.	My mother said negative things about my father's relatives.	V
17.	My mother told my father things just to make him angry.	V
18.	My mother said that she can look after children better than my father can.	V
19.	My mother criticized the presents my father gave me.	I
20.	My mother said things just to spite my father.	V
21.	My mother insulted my father.	V
22.	My mother stomped out of the room or slammed the door after a disagreement with my father.	V
23.	My mother avoided mentioning my father's name.	I

[1] **I = Indirect Hostility V = Verbal Hostility P = Physical Hostility**

[2] **Reversed Item**

1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Occasionally	4 Frequently	5 Constantly	
					Subscale[1]
24. My mother shouted and screamed while discussing issues with my father.					V
25. My mother called my father names.					V
26. My mother left the house when my father came in.					I
27. My mother hung up the phone when my father called.					I
28. My mother told my father that she wished he would drop dead.					V
29. My mother threatened to hit my father.					P
30. My mother said that my father doesn't care about me.					I
31. My mother pushed or shoved my father.					P
32. My mother threw things at my father.					P
33. My mother hit my father.					P
34. My mother kicked my father.					P
35. My mother bit my father during an argument.					P
36. My mother threatened my father with a gun or knife.					P
37. My mother injured my father in a fight.					P
38. My mother used a gun or knife against my father.					P
39. My mother tried to kill my father.					P
1. My father discussed issues calmly with my mother.[2]					I
2. My father did not look at my mother (ie., make eye contact) while talking with her.					I
3. My father disagreed with things that my mother said.					V
4. When my parents argued, my father brought in old issues from the past.					V
5. My father raised his voice while discussing issues with my mother.					V
6. My father avoided talking to my mother directly.					I
7. My father avoided my mother's presence.					I
8. My father gave me messages to tell my mother.					I
9. My father told my mother that she does not support her children.					V
10. My father challenged my mother about how she spends money.					V
11. My father refused to talk with my mother about important things.					I
12. My father argued with my mother about decisions related to me.					V
13. My father nagged my mother.					V
14. My father left the room when my mother came in.					I
15. My father told my mother how she makes him suffer.					V

[1] I = Indirect Hostility V = Verbal Hostility P = Physical Hostility

[2] Reversed Item

1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Occasionally	4 Frequently	5 Constantly	Subscale[1]
16. My father said negative things about my mother's relatives.					V
17. My father told my mother things just to make her angry.					V
18. My father said that he can look after children better than my mother can.					V
19. My father criticized the presents my mother gave me.					I
20. My father said things just to spite my mother.					V
21. My father insulted my mother.					V
22. My father stomped out of the room or slammed the door after a disagreement with my mother.					V
23. My father avoided mentioning my mother's name.					I
24. My father shouted and screamed while discussing issues with my mother.					V
25. My father called my mother names.					V
26. My father left the house when my mother came in.					I
27. My father hung up the phone when my mother called.					I
28. My father told my mother that he wished she would drop dead.					V
29. My father threatened to hit my mother.					P
30. My father said that my mother doesn't care about me.					I
31. My father pushed or shoved my mother.					P
32. My father threw things at my mother.					P
33. My father hit my mother.					P
34. My father kicked my mother.					P
35. My father bit my mother during an argument.					P
36. My father threatened my mother with a gun or knife.					P
37. My father injured my mother in a fight.					P
38. My father used a gun or knife against my mother.					P
39. My father tried to kill my mother.					P

[1] I = Indirect Hostility V = Verbal Hostility P = Physical Hostility

APPENDIX B: TABLES

Table 1 *Alpha Coefficients of Internal Consistency for the Post-Divorce Conflict Scales*

Post-Divorce Conflict Scales	Study 1		Study 2	
	Mother *alpha*	Father *alpha*	Mother *alpha*	Father *alpha*
Verbal Hostility	.92	.89	.90	.88
Physical Hostility	.81	.91	.86	.88
Indirect Hostility	.84	.75	.84	.80
Total Hostility	.94	.91	.93	.93

*N*s for Study 1 ranged from 74 to 89.
*N*s for Study 2 ranged from 130 to 137

Table 2 *Intercorrelations of Subscales In Study 1*

	Mother			Father		
SUBSCALES:	*Verbal*	*Physical*	*Indirect*	*Verbal*	*Physical*	*Indirect*
Mother						
Verbal		.45*	.73*	.59*	.16 ns	.49*
Physical			.55*	.35*	.40*	.34*
Indirect				.53*	.18 ns	.49*
Father						
Verbal					.39*	.57*
Physical						.26*
Indirect						

* $p \leq .01$ ns = non-significant

Table 3 *Intercorrelations of Subscales in Study 2*

	Mother			Father		
SUBSCALES:	*Verbal*	*Physical*	*Indirect*	*Verbal*	*Physical*	*Indirect*
Mother						
Verbal		.42*	.66*	.62*	.23*	.56*
Physical			.35*	.30*	.42*	.30*
Indirect				.60*	.22*	.61*
Father						
Verbal					.48*	.89*
Physical						.49*
Indirect						

* $p \leq .01$

Table 4 *Mothers' and Fathers' Post-Divorce Hostility as Predictors of Sons' and Daughters' Assignment of Blame for the Divorce*

PPCS SUBSCALES	Blame of the Father for the Divorce		Blame of the Mother for the Divorce	
	Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
Verbal Hostility				
Father	.23	.19	-.21	-.01
Mother	.02	.12	.10	.07
Physical Hostility				
Father	.32**	.15	-.27*	.02
Mother	-.11	-.06	.35**	.38**
Indirect Hostility				
Father	.31*	.29*	-.31*	-.01
Mother	.01	.14	.01	.16

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Table 5 *Mothers' and Fathers' Post-Divorce Hostility as Predictors of Sons' and Daughters' Emotional Attachment to each Parent*

PPCS SUBSCALES	Emotional Attachment to Father: Sons	Emotional Attachment to Father: Daughters	Emotional Attachment to Mother: Sons	Emotional Attachment to Mother: Daughters
Verbal Hostility				
Father	.09	-.07	-.12	.27*
Mother	-.02	.12	.01	.28*
Physical Hostility				
Father	.13	-.12	-.26*	.25*
Mother	.34**	.03	-.33**	.21
Indirect Hostility				
Father	.14	-.02	-.14	.22
Mother	.11	.20	.02	.19

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 6 *Mothers' and Fathers' Post-Divorce Hostility as Predictors of Sons' and Daughters' Coalition with each Parent*

PPCS SUBSCALES	Extent of Coalition with Father: Sons	with Father: Daughters	with Mother: Sons	with Mother: Daughters
Verbal Hostility				
Father	-.06	.06	.36**	.02
Mother	.21	.05	.13	-.09
Physical Hostility				
Father	-.39**	.08	.26*	-.19
Mother	-.12	.32**	.08	-.17
Indirect Hostility				
Father	-.18	.06	.30*	.00
Mother	.11	.09	.25	-.15

*p < .05. **p < .01